Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Modernizing the E-rate Program	)	WC Docket No. 13-184
For Schools and Libraries	)	

REPLY COMMENTS OF SPRINT CORPORATION

Sprint Corporation ("Sprint") hereby respectfully submits its reply to comments filed on September 16, 2013 in the above-captioned Notice of Proposed Rulemaking ("NPRM"). This NPRM solicited comment on a very wide range of issues relating to how the E-rate program can be improved. Sprint discusses below three of the key areas raised by commenting parties: the need for flexibility and technological neutrality; the crucial role wireless connectivity will continue to play in the E-rate program; and specific proposals to improve the effectiveness of the E-rate program.

I. TECHNOLOGICAL NEUTRALITY AND FLEXIBILITY AND THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF WIRELESS CONNECTIVITY

One commonly voiced theme in the filed comments is that one size will *not* fit all: schools and libraries have widely varying needs and operate under widely divergent circumstances, and they must have flexibility to deploy technological solutions that will best meet their particular broadband requirements, both current and future. Accordingly, parties urge the Commission to reject the presumption that any one network solution is superior to any other,

and to ensure that any rules it adopts in the instant proceeding are competitively and technologically neutral.[1]

Competitive and technological neutrality has long been a cornerstone principle of the universal service program,[2] and there is no legal, policy, or economic basis for abandoning this principle as the Commission revamps the E-rate program. The Commission should explicitly reject any proposal to give preferential treatment to requests for fiber connectivity (NPRM, para. 77), as such an approach is contrary to established Commission policy, court rulings, and the stated preference of many E-rate applicants who rightly point out that broadband via fiber is only one of several broadband options, and one which may not be cost-effective or even feasible for their particular circumstance. Fiber may well be the most cost-effective technology for some schools and libraries. A technologically neutral approach allows such applicants to select the fiber option; it also allows other schools and libraries that want to deploy different broadband technologies to receive support on a fair and even-handed basis.

Even where fiber connectivity is an option, it is clear that schools and libraries expect wireless connectivity also to be a key element in their technology deployment plans – to, within, and beyond school and library grounds. For example, the Walla Walla Public School system, which has a "bring your own device" policy, stated (p. 1) that its greatest infrastructure need is the "rather severe lack of wireless infrastructure." The Springfield Public Schools plan to build out "a dense wireless network in every school."[3] The West Virginia Dept. of Education "has

[1] *See, e.g.*, comments of Sprint, p. 2; US Cellular, p. 6; Verizon/Verizon Wireless, p. 9; TIA, p. 2; Sunesys, p. 4; CenturyLink, p. 5; Los Angeles Unified School District, p.11; Funds for Learning, p. 24; AT&T, p. 4; California Dept. of Education, p. 8; CCA, p. 2; CTIA, p. 1; Kansas Dept. of Education, p. 5; South Dakota Dept. of Education p. 8; CenturyLink, p. 5; International Association for K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL), p. 10; WISPA, p. 3; South Dakota Dept. of Education, p. 8.

[2] *See, e.g.*, Sprint, p. 2.

[3] Comments of Daniel Warwick, superintendent of the Springfield Public Schools, p. 1.

long encouraged" wireless capacity within its schools capable of handling 1:1 device initiatives and bring your own device policies (p. 12). The New York City Dept. of Education noted (p. 2) that all of its school buildings and its 67,000 classrooms have internet access with wireless capability. 94% of iNACOL member schools surveyed indicated that they had wireless networks, and 78% had wireless Internet access.[4]

Commenting parties also emphasized that wireless connectivity for "anywhere/anytime" learning is of increasing importance. It is undisputed that learning outside the classroom and beyond the traditional school day is critical. Thus, the Rio Elementary School District (p. 1), the Houston Independent School District (p. 3), the Los Angeles Unified School District (p. 9), the California Dept. of Education (p 4), EdLinc (p. 22), iNACOL (p. 16), and SECA (p. 11), to name but a very few, stressed the need to provide broadband internet access to students at home, and the role the E-rate program can play to help bridge the digital divide.[5] To ensure "anytime/anywhere" learning, and to support the ever-increasing use of digital learning tools, the Commission must not just maintain, but indeed aggressively expand E-rate support for off-campus broadband connectivity used for educational purposes.

The value of E-rate-supported off-campus wireless access was documented by the San Diego County Board of Education. It described the "impressive results" from the San Diego Unified School District's Learning-On-the-Go wireless pilot program, which "provided evidence of students' improving achievement, staying in school instead of dropping out, feeling more confident in mathematics, taking ownership for their learning, and showing an increased interest in college," as well as "greater communication with parents who speak a foreign language, and

[4] iNACOL, p. 4.
[5] *See also*, Sprint, p. 9; Verizon/Verizon Wireless, p. 18; TIA, p. 5; Kajeet, p. 1; Comcast, p. 1; CCA, p. 7; CTIA, p. 1; Qualcomm, p. 4; Beverly Perdue, Digital Learning Institute, p. 1.

improved professional development opportunities for community members…."[6] Based on these highly promising results, San Diego County Board of Education urged the Commission to "expand the E-rate program to fund mobile broadband access inside and outside of schools and libraries…so that America's poorest students can have anywhere/anytime access to the same learning tools that other students routinely use."[7]

The benefits of wireless connectivity to and within school and library grounds could be enhanced even further by making "managed WiFi" – integrated hardware, software, network transport and professional integration solutions that ensure proper deployment and on-going management of the network, mobile devices, and software (*e.g.*, for CIPA compliance)[8] -- eligible for E-rate support. Networks are complicated to deploy and manage, especially with the proliferation of devices and applications, and many schools and libraries lack the IT resources to handle such projects efficiently and effectively. As the West Virginia Dept. of Education stated (p. 14), "…not all schools have the staff or ability or time to install or provide software or applications on every device." The San Diego County Board of Education similarly pointed out (p. 3) that "Mobile Device Management (MMDM) solutions, Internet-based content filtering and antivirus applications are important parts of the instructional technology ecosystem and extending E-rate eligibility for these solutions aligns with the original intent of CIPA and other Internet safety precautions." iNACOL reported (p. 13) that over 80% of its members rely on "network maintenance and security services to maintain their connections for student usage," and that such "crucial components" should be E-rate eligible. While Managed WiFi may seem more expensive than obtaining hardware and software on a piece-part basis, it can prove to be highly cost-effective when viewed from a total cost perspective. The effectiveness of a network

[6] San Diego County Board of Education, p. 6. *See also*, Qualcomm, p. 3.
[7] San Diego County Board of Education, p. 7, emphasis in original.
[8] *See* Sprint, p. 8.

depends in part on the "total cost of operating that network," which includes management tools that might lower bandwidth requirements but which currently are not E-rate eligible.[9] Especially when the cost savings associated with lower headcount at a school or library are factored in, Managed WiFi service can be a highly cost-effective option that should be E-rate eligible.[10]

II. SPECIFIC PROPOSALS TO IMPROVE ADMINISTRATION OF THE E-RATE PROGRAM

The NPRM requested comment on numerous proposals to improve the efficiency and efficacy of the E-rate program. Sprint replies to three issues raised in the comment round: officer certifications on E-rate forms, the remittance of BEAR payments directly to E-rate applicants, and the proposed phase-down of support to existing services.

Insofar as Sprint is aware, there was no support for the proposal to require an officer of a service provider, rather than an "authorized person" appointed by the service provider, to certify Forms 472, 473 and 474. As Sprint (p. 13), CenturyLink (p. 29), and Verizon/Verizon Wireless (p. 28) explained, this proposal will affect the filing of potentially thousands of documents, the details of which an officer will have little or no direct knowledge. Requiring an officer's signature will create an administrative bottleneck and is unlikely to reduce waste, fraud and abuse. Therefore, the Commission should decline to adopt this proposal.

There was widespread support for the proposal to remit BEAR payments directly to the E-rate school or library, rather than having the service provider serve as the middleman.[11] Direct payment to the applicant would streamline the reimbursement process and eliminate the

[9] *See* Funds for Learning, p. 10.
[10] *See* Sprint, p. 9; E-Rate Provider Services, p. 8; Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, p. 3 (urging E-rate support for professional services supporting WiFi and mobile devices); *see also*, New York City Dept. of Education, p. 7, urging E-rate support for professional staff time devoted to administering their school's E-rate program.
[11] *See, e.g.,* Sprint, p. 12; AT&T, p. 14; Kansas Dept. of Education, p. 8; San Diego County Board of Education, p. 3; Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, p. 16; Utah Education Network, p. 3; US Telecom, p. 13; Verizon/Verizon Wireless, p. 19; SECA, p. 45; CenturyLink, p. 26.

possibility that a service provider does not pass through the payment either at all or on a timely basis. Implementation of this proposal is not expected to increase program costs or to have other negative ramifications.

There was, however, some dispute over the merits of discontinuing support for certain services that are currently eligible. Of particular concern is AT&T's suggestion that support for "all circuit switched and TDM-based services," including DS1s, DS3s, T1s and T3s, be limited and eventually eliminated.[12] Sprint certainly does not deny that the industry has moved aggressively to IP technology, and IP interconnection, particularly for data, has been successfully deployed by a broad swath of carriers.[13] However, it is simply incorrect to assert that special access DS1, DS3, T1 and T3 circuits are irrelevant or no longer necessary for the provision of broadband or voice services. In fact, these special access facilities remain critical to the provision of wireless and long distance services, and the Commission should not allow the premature deregulation of, or the removal of E-rate support for, monopoly backbone facilities.

Also premature is the suggested phase-down of support for cellular data plans and air cards. Mobile services such as these remain valuable and cost-effective (such as for use on school buses on field trips),[14] and E-rate support for such services should continue.

[12] *See* AT&T, p. 9 and Attachment 1.
[13] Sprint also has sought (thus far, without success) voice IP interconnection agreements with AT&T and other RBOCs.
[14] *See, e.g.*, Sprint, p. 17; Verizon/Verizon Wireless, p. 17; Qualcomm, p. 8.

Respectfully submitted,

SPRINT CORPORATION

/s/ Charles W. McKee

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Charles W. McKee
Vice President, Government Affairs
Federal and State Regulatory

Norina T. Moy
Director, Government Affairs

900 Seventh St. NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20001
(703) 433-4503

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